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ABSTRACT

This document contains selected proceedings from a conference that was convened in the Mississippi Delta region to provide interested stakeholders (citizens and local public officials) with information about recent federal and state welfare reform legislation. The document begins with an explanation of how the old Aid to Families with Dependent Children and new Temporary Assistance for Needy Families programs differ from one another from the standpoints of benefits, requirements, exemptions, and sanctions. Special attention is paid to the effects of welfare reforms on local governments and the activities of Delta State University's Center for Community Development to promote welfare reform. Presented next are the texts of four presentations: "Setting the Stage: Regional Implications" (Mark Manning); "Opening Remarks" (Marianne Hill); "State Legislative Update" (Willie Simmons); and "Federal Legislative Update" (Deborah Weinstein). Concluding the document is the text of the panel discussion held during the conference's morning session moderated by Marianne Hill. Appended are the following: excerpts from presentations by Marianne Hill; citation of an article published by Marianne Hill; addresses of the four conference partners; list of conference planning committee members; and conference agenda. (MN)

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The Center for Community Development

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Welfare Reform: *Challenges and Opportunities for Public- Private Partnerships*

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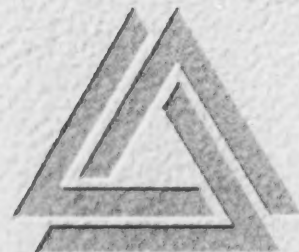
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Delta State University



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***Welfare Reform: Challenges and Opportunities
for Public-Private Partnerships***

Les Range, Editor

Selected Proceedings
from

*A Conference for Local Government Officials
in
the Mississippi Delta Region*

held at

Delta State University
Cleveland, Mississippi

on
May 29, 1997

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Center for Community Development, Delta State University
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Contents

Forward	i
Acknowledgments	ii
Introduction	1
The Welfare Reform Law	2
Effects of Reform on Local Governments	3
Welfare Reform Conference Overview	4
Conference Objectives	4
Themes	5
Welfare Reform Conference	6
Mark Manning, Director of Development, The Delta Council	7
Dr. Marianne Hill, Center for Policy Research and Planning	8
Senator Willie Simmons, Mississippi Legislature	10
Deborah Weinstein, Children's Defense Fund	11
Panel and Audience Discussion	13
Appendices	43
A Excerpts from presentations and an article by Dr. Marianne Hill	44
B Conference Partners	48
C Conference Planning Committee	49
D Conference Agenda	50

Forward

This document summarizes the proceedings of a major regional welfare reform conference held at Delta State University (DSU) in Cleveland, Mississippi in May of 1997. Its purpose was to provide information to interested stakeholders about the new federal and state Welfare Reform legislation. This publication is the first product in what is expected to be an ongoing series of reports by the Center for Community Development on emerging issues such as welfare reform, local government and community and leadership development.

A major outgrowth of the effort has focused on building an alliance of regional stakeholders who are committed to developing and implementing a long term technical assistance strategy aimed at helping local governments in small Delta communities prepare for the impact of the legislation.

The foundation of this alliance was established when the DSU Center for Community Development's Delta Partners Initiative staff and a core group conference partners agreed to plan this one-day, information dissemination conference. The partners are considering taking the following steps:

- Establishing a **Delta Welfare Reform Alliance for Progress**, which would consist of a core group of Delta-based members with associate membership extended to statewide or non-Delta based groups who have a vested interest in working closely on the issue.
- Conducting quarterly meetings, each meeting hosted by a different partner.
- Meetings will serve the purpose of allowing for member updates, the sharing of information and the presentation of project ideas for which collaboration and partnership are desirable.
- Entering into written Collaboration Agreements, which could prove useful to fund raising efforts that different members might undertake in support of their welfare reform work.
- Publishing periodic newsletters to share up to date developments and information about welfare reform and related issues.

Comments or questions about these proceedings and the **Delta Welfare Reform Alliance for Progress** are welcome and may be directed to: Les Range, Program Leader, Local Government and Economic Development, Delta Partners Initiative, Center for Community Development, Delta State University, P. O. Box 3134, Cleveland, MS 38733.

Acknowledgments

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- ✓ Conference partners and planning committee members for having the foresight and for making the commitment to support such a major undertaking,
- ✓ Center for Community Development staff and student workers who provided the support that helped make the entire effort run smoothly,
- ✓ Bill Wilson and Lynn Weaver of the Delta State University Audio-Visual Department for recording the meeting,
- ✓ Bertha Neal, Administrative Associate in the Center for Community Development, for transcribing the audio tapes,
- ✓ Nicole Schmidt, Graduate Assistant in the Center for Community Development, for wading through the transcript and putting it into a format that could be closely edited,
- ✓ Dr. Jerry W. Robinson, Jr. and Dr. Caryl Abrahams for their editorial reviews and comments; and
- ✓ M. Darlene Carey, DPI Program Associate in the Center for Community Development, for attention to detail, formatting the material and getting this piece into final form for printing and distribution.

Introduction

The Federal Welfare Reform Law (Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Act of 1996) was passed as an attempt to end dependence of welfare recipients on the government. Changes mandated by the new assistance program are work-oriented, time limited and require that participants enroll in education and training programs to prepare for entering the workforce.

State governments, agencies, businesses and communities have begun to face problems as they work to implement the law and to find creative and permanent solutions to the cycle of poverty resultant from the old welfare system. As a result of this legislation, reform conferences are being held across the country to educate the general public and to encourage those who are in charge of making and implementing changes to receive feedback from the people who are most affected. This report provides a brief overview of the welfare system, its recent changes and presents dialogue from a welfare reform conference held in May of 1997, at Delta State University in Cleveland, MS.

This document is provided as a tool in the welfare reform education, implementation and problem-solving process.

The Welfare Reform Law

The recent welfare reform law replaced Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) with Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF). A summary of several aspects of legislation follows.

- ✓ **Benefits** - Under TANF, a recipient can receive benefits for a maximum of 60 months. The main goal of TANF is to prepare recipients to become self-sufficient, and end their need for financial assistance from the government. To achieve this goal, TANF recipients who are not exempt are required to find work within 24 months of receiving assistance. To secure a work position, the TANF recipient is aided by a case worker to create a plan of action.
- ✓ **Requirements** - On-the-job training, vocational training, or other job skills training, are approved as work activities under the new law. If the participant receives TANF payments or Food Stamps while participating in the work activity, this work activity will not count as part of the 24-month limit. However, child care and transportation may be included without excluding the recipient from this time limit. In addition, Medicaid

may continue up to 12 months after the recipient's time limit under TANF.

- ✓ **Exemptions** - Recipients can be exempted from the 60-month time limit because of disability, caring for a sick person, being over the age of 60 or the age of 18, or being a victim of domestic violence. Exemptions for the 24 months time limit include disability under 30 days, third trimester of pregnancy, caring for a child under 12 months old, and for substance abuse treatment.
- ✓ **Sanctions** - Individuals who do not comply with the new standards set by TANF may be sanctioned. This means that the TANF and Food Cases will be closed for the entire family. A violation system has been set in place, allowing "three strikes" before final termination. Also benefits may be denied in a number of cases including, but not limited to, failure to establish paternity or obtain child support, minors not living in the home for more than 30 days, anyone avoiding prosecution for a crime or violating conditions of probation, for ten years following conviction of misrepresentation of facts to receive TANF funds, and to those receiving SSI funds.

EFFECTS OF WELFARE REFORMS ON LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

With these reforms, local governments are often ultimately responsible, yet frequently unprepared for finding solutions to problems effecting citizens in their communities. Welfare payments make up a major source of income for a large percentage of the residents in the small towns of the Mississippi Delta. This often causes a significant decline in the tax base due to the low income from welfare. Also, reduced family income will cause a reduction in the purchase of food and other products. In turn, local government will receive less income from sales tax.

The Center's Mission and Role

The Center for Community Development (Center) at Delta State University has made welfare reform a primary focus for its Local Government Program. This commitment means building alliances with stakeholders committed to developing and implementing long-term technical assistance to the governments in the small towns of the Mississippi Delta which are facing changes brought about by welfare reform.

The foundation for the Center's involvement in welfare reform issues was put in place with this welfare reform conference. The conference was organized by the Center's Delta Partner's Initiative (DPI) staff and executed on May 29, 1997. Since the Center's mission is "building partnerships to help communities help themselves", the program leader solicited sponsorship and support from a number of Delta-based organizations.

In addition to the Center, the lead sponsors of the conference included several Delta-based organizations: Mississippi Action for Community Education (MACE) from Greenville, Mississippi, Tri-County Workforce Alliance, from Clarksdale, and the Mid-Delta Workforce Alliance, from Greenville.

These organizations have agreed to the the shared goal of assisting local governments in working with their citizens, educators, organizations, and the private sector in responding to welfare reform changes, from job creation to job training. Several other major resource providers both inside and outside the region served as co-sponsors.

WELFARE REFORM CONFERENCE OVERVIEW

The conference had morning and afternoon sessions and a formal luncheon. During the morning portion, presentations were followed by audience questions and comments. The morning session opened with comments by Dr. Kent Wyatt, President, Delta State University. Opening speakers were: Ruby Buck, President and CEO of MACE; Mark Manning, Director of Development, Delta Council; and Dr. Marianne Hill, Center for Policy and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning. A plenary session with a panel of speakers followed with Dr. Hill serving as moderator. The panel included Senator Willie Simmons, Mississippi Legislature; Deborah Weinstein of the Children's Defense Fund in Washington, D.C.; Jean Denson of Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development; Harold Hall of Fine Vines in Greenville, MS; John Ferguson of Mid-Delta Workforce Alliance in Greenville, MS; and George Walker from Tri-County Workforce Alliance in Clarksdale, MS. (See program in Appendix)

Luncheon presenters included Mississippi Congressman Bennie Thompson and Senator Paul Wellstone of

Minnesota. Other speakers included Jerry Robinson, Jr., Director, Center for Community Development, Delta State University; Harry Bowie, Delta Foundation; and Harold Lathon, Executive Director, Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance. The afternoon session focused on small group discussions. Six groups, formed of the conference attendees, discussed the welfare reforms especially as those reforms affect additional training and technical assistance for recipients, and provided feedback to the Center and its conference partners.

Conference Objectives and Themes

The main objective of the conference was to help inform citizens, especially public officials, about the changes being brought about by the new welfare reform legislation and to allow the participants to provide feedback concerning the problems which have arisen in the implementation process. During the discussions with panel members and within the small groups, several themes took shape.

Emerging Themes

The following provides a list of those themes, mostly stated as problems or

needs, mentioned by members of the participating audience.

- Need for adult vo-tech education in schools during the summer;
- Need for the posting of job openings in local churches;
- Allowance for Medicaid to be given to any child in need;
- Need for additional state funds for training;
- Need for job training to include money management and self-marketing skills;
- Need to build on existing relationships, especially with community colleges, training programs and Department of Human Services;
- Need for business support of public schooling;
- Need for the establishment of specific programs with set curriculum for business employment;
- Need for added training of personnel to accept TANF employees in their new work environments;
- Need for information of TANF affects on grandparent caretakers;
- Need for TANF to address health care needs;
- Need for the establishment of information bureau to inform citizens

on reforms;

- Need for the development of citizen panels to review sanction cases;
- Need for moderate income, non-subsidized housing;
- Need for education regarding appeal options and documentation of law violations;
- Need to add nutritional education in TANF education plan;
- Need for increased involvement of ministers;
- Need for additional information on funding available through block grants and national funding;
- Need to provide child care for children into their teenage years;
- Need to cover transportation costs for jobs and training;
- Need for wages above minimum wage;
- Need to attract businesses to the Delta;
- Need for a safety net for individuals who fail training programs;
- Need for training to operate up to two years for certain job preparation;
- Need for sensitivity training for Department of Human Services workers; and
- Need for welfare recipient participation at reform discussion.

WELFARE REFORM CONFERENCE

SELECTED PROCEEDINGS FROM THE OPENING SESSION

Setting the Stage: Regional Implications

Mark Manning, Director of
Development, The Delta Council

I, like many of the members of this audience, have never had to suffer the shame of being on welfare. I have never had to pay for my children's food with government stamps. And, I have never had to watch my parents sit at home because they did not have a job. So, perhaps my comments might be judged as somewhat uninformed. Nonetheless, simply BECAUSE I have not had to experience these tragic events, I feel it is my civic obligation to become part of this process and hopefully help create opportunities for others.

Two contrasting views of welfare reform are feasible. First, welfare reform is the WORST thing that can possibly happen in the Mississippi Delta.

Two contrasting views of welfare reform are feasible. First, "welfare reform is the WORST thing that can possibly happen in the Mississippi Delta." Families that are living on the edge will have their very thin security removed. Mothers will have to abandon their children for

much of the day to earn enough for food. Families will disintegrate as they struggle for survival, and innocent children will go hungry with no means of relief.

The flow of Federal transfer payments will become a trickle. Businesses will fail as area income declines. And the Delta will see a drastic decline in any progress we have made in socio-economic indicators.

Second, "welfare reform is the BEST thing that could happen to the Mississippi Delta." Families that have experienced generations of public support will begin to enter the economic mainstream. Tax collections will rise as a result of increased employment. Government services will improve. And, those who have experienced the indignity of dependence will rise from the depths of poverty to help make the Delta the shining star she deserves to be.

...welfare reform is the BEST thing that could happen to the Mississippi Delta.

Either of these statements can be true. Either of these statements can be real. The future is not concrete, but a result of the work we begin to do today. The vision we hold together. If we work to provide real employment opportunities, improved educational

delivery, enhanced job training, and build on a spirit of shared vision, we can not only survive, but will truly prosper. If not, the question is already answered.

Opening Remarks

**Dr. Marianne Hill, Center for Policy
Research and Planning,
Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning**

Good morning! It is good to see so many concerned individuals here today--welfare reform will be better, the more open and accountable the process is. In fact, if welfare legislation is ever to work, is ever to improve the lot of poor women and children, it will require that people like yourselves are concerned and involved.

As the morning proceeds, it will become clear that childcare and transportation are underfunded, and that other problems threaten the ability of the new TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program to help women on welfare to get and hold jobs.

...childcare and transportation are underfunded, and that other problems threaten the ability of the new TANF (Temporary Assistance to Needy Families) program to help women on welfare to get and hold jobs.

As you probably are aware, the TANF program in Mississippi requires immediate employment of all work-ready recipients. The new federal legislation imposes a lifetime limit of five years on welfare assistance. Even with adequate funding, such a huge change would make problems and economic hardship for some inevitable. There are already signs that this is occurring. Justice and compassion demand that efforts at reform result in a clearer understanding of the needs of poor women and their families, and a more realistic approach to ensuring that those needs are met.

Much talk about welfare mothers is directed at those who have not finished high school and who have no recent employment experience. In fact, this is a minority of welfare households here.

Most (54 percent) have a high school education and have worked within the past two years, but the work has been generally low-wage and part-time.

Most (54 percent) have a high school education and have worked within the past two years, but the work has been generally low-wage and part-time. For these households, it is the quality of jobs feasible for them that is the issue; the jobs that are available are women's low-

skill jobs that do not pay enough to cover much beyond transportation and licensed childcare. Unskilled mothers can't easily become bus drivers or security guards due to occupational segregation. Also, pay equity is a problem. Childcare workers, for example, earn less than a man in a job demanding fewer skills.

In Mississippi, as elsewhere, women's pay contributes to the high poverty rate among female-headed households. Seventy percent of children in female-headed households are living in poverty in the state (1990 Census figures).

Women are not expected to be economically independent. Even when a black woman here works in a year-round, full-time job, her earnings at the median level keep her family below the poverty line for a household of four (1990 Census data). Median earnings for a black woman working full-time, year-round were only 46 percent that of a white man working full-time, according to the U.S. Census of 1990.

Our panel today focuses on the immediate needs of women under the TANF program and on what the community can do, rather than on the long-term possibilities. It may be the

case, however, that in the long-run, a variety of supports will need to be instituted that address the needs of all low-income families--needs in the areas of training, childcare, transportation, and health care, as well as in other services. It is likely that income supplements will continue to be needed to assist low-income mothers who are only able to work part-time.

We have with us as panelists, individuals who bring a wealth of experience to our morning discussion. Each will speak and then respond to a series of questions from myself and the audience.¹

State Legislative Update

Senator Willie Simmons
Mississippi Legislature

There are two main themes that should be discussed concerning Welfare Reform and the State Legislature. First, for the legislature to improve the system, there needs to be documentation of the specific problems arising from the reforms.

¹For additional information concerning Marianne Hill's research and presentations on welfare reform, see the Appendices.

Looking simply at the number of TANF recipients who fall off the roll is not enough to enact change. Specific reasons for the dropping numbers are needed.

Looking simply at the number of TANF recipients who fall off the roll is not enough to enact change. Specific reasons for the dropping numbers are needed. For the Mississippi legislature to improve the system, it needs meaningful documentation soon.

Second, entrepreneurship is essential to rebuild communities. Because of few new businesses in failing communities, especially communities where the majority of residents are black, there continues to be an economic decline in the Delta. Therefore, mentoring, training, and partnering for new businesses needs to be addressed by local and state legislatures. There needs to be documentation of how the state can help foster entrepreneurship – the development of new small businesses. Obviously, from these comments, an efficient system of monitoring and documenting problems resulting from welfare reform needs to be put in place before the legislature will be able to act.

Federal Legislative Update

**Deborah Weinstein, Children's
Defense Fund, Washington D.C.**

In terms of how things are going so far, I would say not promisingly. But, what possibilities are there in this federal law? Well, I think of this as not a welfare program, but a pot of money. There is a set amount of money available and that is it! It does not grow according to need. If we have more need, more unemployment, this is all the money there is, both state and federal dollars. The state dollars, however, can be used in ways the federal dollars can not be. You can help families beyond the five-year time limit with state dollars. You can use the money in ways that help people who you don't think are so likely to be engaged in work. That is important to remember.

First, the Department of Labor has said that people have to be paid the minimum wage for work.

Now, in terms of how you can get jobs. There are a couple of points to notice about things that are happening now in Washington. First, the Department of Labor has said that people have to be paid the minimum

wage for work. If they are doing community service, and it meets the definition of work, which is quite broad, they have to be paid minimum wage. Mississippi has the distinction of being the only state in the nation where, even if you count in the food stamp income, plus the cash assistance grant, that is does not come up to the minimum rate for a family of three or more. So, here is the opportunity to build in a little more income for families.

Now, if the parent is involved in training, the minimum wage does not have to be paid.

Now, if the parent is involved in training, the minimum wage does not have to be paid. There are two ways to think about this. We want to build more training into experiences, and suddenly there is an incentive for more training to be provided because the additional increment of money does not have to be provided. I would like to see more money going into the hands of those families, but as a long-term strategy, training is vital, and this might be the means that you can use to build more incentives.

On its way to Congress now is three billion dollars of jobs money that could

perhaps be tapped by your region to be used once the time limit is reached. That is a pot of money that can be tapped into. If, for instance, AmeriCorps needs a pot of money from the local community to get an AmeriCorps volunteer, you could potentially use the federal dollars through this three billion dollar jobs money to pay for that AmeriCorps volunteer.² You could devise other programs where you put pots of money from different sources together to get an income for people. There are tax credits available, and though I have always been skeptical of those tax credits, in non-welfare, non low-income related areas, businesses are very creative. A business that has liability might like to buy the use of a tax break from another company that can not use the tax break.

Are there ways that non-profits and for-profit businesses can collaborate to take full advantage of the tax breaks available from the federal government for hiring low-income workers? I don't have the answer to that, but people ought to be thinking of those creative ways to use those dollars.

Transportation is one of the critical

²To do so would require change in federal policy. Current legislation will not allow use of federal funds to pay the 15% match for AmeriCorps members cost of living allowance.

issues. Also on the table out there is a little money that could be available, likely through a transportation bill heading to Congress that is called NECTEA, National Economic Crossroads Transportation Efficiency Act, one hundred million dollars a year for the next six years. It is not a fortune, but funds like these could be tapped into to buy vans, set up transportation services, which would help people to get jobs and would hire people as drivers and dispatchers.

Unless we think of pooling the money in this way, we are not going to be able to find jobs. There is no one answer, there are a million little answers. Child care, of course, is vital. It is vital that the state makes use of every available federal dollar to pay for childcare. Health coverage is also vital. We came close in Washington just the other day on the Hatch-Kennedy Bill to extend health coverage to children. We did not quite make it, but if we could get an increase in the minimum wage passed, maybe we have a chance next time around.

There is no one answer, there are a million little answers.

PANEL DISCUSSION WITH AUDIENCE PARTICIPATION
DR. MARIANNE HILL, MODERATOR
MORNING SESSION

**Panel Discussion with Audience
Participation**

Dr. Marianne Hill, Moderator

I have now a series of questions, one aimed to each of our panelists, and then after that, they'll be free to comment on and add whatever they desire. My first question is for John Ferguson of the Mid-Delta Work Force Alliance, and George Walker, Chair of the Tri-County Work Force Alliance. *Are there sufficient jobs available for all work-ready welfare recipients in your area?* Let's begin with Mr. Ferguson.

John Ferguson, Mid-Delta Work Force Alliance: Thank you. A quick answer, and a short answer to that is, "no".

Dr. Hill: *Can more jobs be developed?*

Ferguson: Yes, more jobs can be developed. But for the jobs to be developed, there must be adequate training for the individual job and the person has to be job-ready. Training has to be provided to ensure that jobs will be available. The training component for each specific job has to be provided.

Dr. Hill: Should I turn to Mr. Walker?

George Walker, Chair of the Tri-County Workforce Alliance: Yes. I think we have a classic case here of the chicken and the egg -- which comes first? We're not going to get jobs in the Delta, I feel very strongly, until we have trained people. I think the path of wisdom is to train the people to be ready for jobs. Perhaps later in my remarks, I'll get into that a little bit further.

We're not going to get jobs in the Delta, I feel very strongly, until we have trained people. I think the path of wisdom is to train the people to be ready for jobs.

I'm very involved in economic development. The question asked by people thinking of providing jobs in the Mississippi Delta, used to be where the highways are, where the sewers are, and who has street lights. They don't care about that anymore, everybody has those things. What they care about now is a labor survey, including demographics by education. If you don't have the educated workforce, people are not going to come. So in my humble opinion, after some years in business, we have to train people and the jobs will come.

Dr. Hill: All right, well that leads right into my next question, which is for Jean Denson, who is with the Employment Training Division of the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). *What are some of the training programs available in Mississippi, and which are the more effective training programs? Keep in mind the special needs of TANF recipients for child care and transportation. That's a big question.*

Jean Denson, Employment Training Division of DECD: Yes, it is. I would have to say that the most prevalent training assistance for welfare recipients would be either the Pell Grant, or the Job Training Partnership Act. Both of these programs provide tuition assistance, and perhaps some subsistence.

...through our experience in the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the most successful training programs for welfare recipients have been in the medical field.

I'd have to say that through our experience in the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA), the most successful training programs for welfare recipients have been in the medical field.

Some of these individuals begin their work in the medical field as nurse assistant, and because of the environment they're in, they're encouraged to go for an LPN. Once they work for a while as an LPN, that same environment encourages them to move toward RN. In JTPA, we are funding training for nursing assistants, LPN's and RN's. In fact, last year one of our RN's from the Mississippi Delta who was a welfare recipient received a presidential award for her educational experiences. Nationally, studies have indicated that welfare recipients who go to work in medical environments have over a 61% probability of maintaining that work, even after a year of work experience.

We can't forget the non-traditional job training either, because it's the non-traditional jobs for women that provide wages above the poverty level. We all know that beginning in the '70's, to maintain a middle income status, we had to have two wage earners in a family. Believe it or not, another very popular training program in JTPA for welfare recipients has been truck drivers. With only a few weeks of training, a welfare recipient can quickly earn \$30,000 a year with good benefits, and we have had that occur.

We all know that beginning in the '70's, to maintain a middle income status, we had to have two wage earners in a family.

Dr. Hill:

Thank you very much. The next question was to have been for a work force participant, but unfortunately she had problems getting child care at the last moment. We have with us, though, Ellen Reddy, who is Director of Field Services at the Mississippi Action for Community Education, so I will address the question to her. This question relates to both job training and the problem of a job in general. There are some good training programs available, but for women on welfare, however, child care and transportation remain a problem. *So, based on the experience of work force participants that you know, when a job is available, what kind of support are they getting for child care and transportation?*

Ellen Reddy, MACE: Well, the persons that I've spoken with say there's limited support in terms of transportation and child care. Often, the recipient is told that they will have to incur the cost for child care and transportation, at least initially, until the Department of Human

Services can pick up that expense.

Often, the recipient is told that they will have to incur the cost for child care and transportation, at least initially, until the Department of Human Services can pick up that expense.

When you look at the amount of a consumer's check for the month, consider if you're going back and forth to work on a daily basis, the \$3 to \$4 for transport could really use up someone's check in less than a few weeks. Therefore, cash money is not always available for transportation. The people I spoke with also said that the training they receive often times really isn't training. They're basically doing a job because the service is free to the employer, and they can take advantage of using the new person without really paying anything for the person's skills.

Dr. Hill: Well, definitely there are some problems in implementation. Some of the amounts that are being paid for child care and transportation are way too low in relationship to the need. We have a work force employer here. I'm going to ask Harold Hall from Fine Vines what his experience with TANF hirees has been.

Harold Hall, Fine Vines: Good morning. First, let me say that Fine Vines is kind of a unique organization. It's an apparel company that basically manufactures blue jeans, and I see many of you out there who are familiar with the company. Second, we're owned by an organization called the Delta Foundation whose mission is economic development in this particular area. Several years ago we were selected as a pilot project or demonstration project to participate in the Work First program. What we found were the typical difficulties that we normally find with most of our employees.

Several years ago we were selected as a pilot project or demonstration project to participate in the Work First program.

Let me give you a profile of Fine Vines. Fine Vines is about 98% African American in terms of employees. It is about 96% female, and the average individual at Fine Vines is more than likely a high school dropout with an average education of about the 10th grade. About 60% are single heads of households, and so, we are quite familiar with working with that particular target group. What we found is that people, basically, are creative. We can create all of these great programs from a

bureaucratic standpoint that we want, but the reality is that in terms of finding a baby sitter, people depend upon grandma, they depend upon mama, and they do those basic things that your parents did and my parents did.

Greenville is not the Mecca of public transportation, as we all know. Most individuals depended upon a friend, and they would car pool and ride together.

The program was extremely successful, and I know I'm going a little bit beyond my bounds, but we had 28 participants, we employed 15 and we currently have seven still on board, which is better than our normal turnover rate for "non-welfare" candidates.

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Dr. Hill:

One of the problems that I've heard is that a woman relies on a neighbor to provide transportation, and then she's supposed to be able to reimburse the neighbor with funds from Human Services which have, apparently, been having problems coming through. *Are neighbors continuing to provide this service even though there is no subsidy*

for the transportation or child care that they provide?

Hall: In our particular case, and I don't believe that we are unique, the employee was dealing with a family member, and even though family members will cut deals and say they want payment, if you beg grandma, she'll take care of the baby.

Dr. Hill:

Okay, the next question I have is for Senator Simmons. As you are aware, that after one year, TANF participants are no longer part of the program. Even if they still remain below the poverty line, they will be losing their subsidies. *Are you in favor of using TANF money after the women are no longer in TANF? There will still be sums available with the legislature. Would you be in favor of using that money for training and for other ways of assisting women who are working but still living below the poverty line?*

Simmons: The state is restricted by the federal law. There is a limit in the amount of training that can be provided with TANF funds. I would be in favor of continuing to give supplements or

support to the participants, especially if they are not earning sufficient funds to provide adequately for their children and themselves. We may not be able to use TANF funds in all of those areas. However, I think the state has a responsibility, and I favor working with the local government to continue to provide the support that is needed.

We are talking about self-sufficiency, and we know that if an individual is earning minimum wage and has two or three dependents, they aren't going to be able to become self-sufficient unless we continue to provide a supplement in some form. So, we have a choice. We must create jobs that are going to pay more than the \$4.50 an hour, or local government needs to continue to supplement that family in some form, whether it be in the area of transportation, child care, housing, or whatever. We cannot cut that individual off after earning minimum wage for one year and expect them to become truly self-sufficient.

...we know that if an individual is earning minimum wage and has two or three dependents, they aren't going to be able to become self-sufficient unless we continue to provide a supplement in some form.

The answer to your question is yes, I do favor us doing that. As we talk about jobs, we must understand that Mississippi is now getting into the practice of using or bringing migrants, individuals from across state lines to fill certain jobs. That may be a result of individuals not being trained, or individuals not being available for those jobs. Not that we want to keep individuals from coming into the state, but we must first begin to make sure that our population is trained and that our citizens are available for those jobs that exist in the state.

Dr. Hill:

Thank you Senator Simmons. I would mention that TANF funds are somewhat flexible in that a certain percentage, I believe it is up to 30%, can eventually be transferred over to child care, for example, or to the social services block so there might be some room there for different uses of funds down the line. Jean Denson had something to contribute, so I'll recognize her.

Denson: Thank you. I wanted to add that there are two training resources that would still be available to welfare

recipients who have been working for a year and are still earning below the poverty line. They remain eligible for the Job Training Partnership Act. We have identified those individuals as primary targets for services. The individuals could receive tuition assistance to attend a local community college, or that individual could be hired by another employer to learn a new skill. That earning time would be considered on-the-job training. The employer would be reimbursed 50% of the wages during the training period. So we need to encourage welfare recipients to grow in their careers and to continue to look in the labor market for increased wage jobs. Our community college career centers need to be real resources for these individuals. Employers could take advantage of some of the employer training programs that are available and continue to upgrade the skills of the welfare client.

So we need to encourage welfare recipients to grow in their careers and to continue to look in the labor market for increased wage jobs.

Dr. Hill:

The next question is for Deborah Weinstein of the Children's Defense Fund. Unpaid community service jobs

with local government can be used to fulfill TANF work requirements. That is if other paid employment cannot be found. Besides jobs with local government, in theory, jobs with non-profit volunteer organizations could also count as employment. *What kind of community service jobs do you think offer the potential for most improving the long-term income of welfare recipients, and would you favor volunteer work as fulfilling TANF work requirements?*

Weinstein: Well, I wouldn't exactly call it volunteer work, since it's the only way of getting subsistence income. Community service is certainly a way that you can give people certain skills, job experience and contacts. Think of any high school or college student who interned someplace so that they could make contacts. They could put it on their resume and it would help them get either into college or into a job.

Community service is certainly a way that you can give people certain skills, job experience and contacts.

There is no question that community service can have an impact for anybody. There are ways to make it more likely that community service will have a

payoff for people. The Department of Labor has said, that consistent with the Fair Labor Standards Act, people who are doing community service work, where the main share of it is simply employment, should be paid minimum wage. That means that Mississippi will have to kick in a little more money. There are ways the food stamp income can count towards the minimum wage as well.

The strategy is to build education and training into a community service experience. By using federal dollars and the experience which counts towards the federal work participation requirement, a participant can receive on-the-job training doing community service in a health care or educational setting, or any place where basic skills are incorporated. On-the-job training can count toward the federal work participation requirement.

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If you think in terms of a package, vocational education is also allowable for one year for 20% of the caseload. Think of some people doing a year of vocational education first, perhaps, followed by a year or so of community service which really is like the field of placement on-the-job training. That could, if it were packaged well, perhaps work out to be equivalent of an AA degree. Think of people who haven't finished high school and start them with a year of community service where the basic skills are followed up by a year of vocational training. There are many ways that you can build on the community service model. Do good for the community, give people experience, and give them some basic skills as well. It's a worthwhile investment.

Dr. Hill:

The next question has to do with what we've seen happening with TANF participants. There has been a drop of over 25% in the number of people enrolled in welfare here in Mississippi during the past 3 years. Some of this is due to the fact that the economy is getting better, but a lot has to do with the way that Welfare Reform has been implemented. Looking at the experience

of other states, it seems that in many cases, these women who are no longer receiving welfare assistance still have not improved their economic situation. If they are not employed full-time, what is their situation? This is an open-ended question to the panel. *What is happening to these people? Do you think they are dropping off the welfare rolls in the state?*

Reddy: I think for many of them, they're just deciding that is not worth the embarrassment, the feeling of self-degradation when they go to the Department of Human Services and ask for support. Often, they are treated like second class citizens, made to feel as if the money's coming from someone's pocket in particular, and there's a difference between the person sitting on one side of the table and the person on the other side of the table. That was one of the issues that came up when I spoke with responders who had planned to be here today.

You know, people are mistreated at social services offices. During our December conference at MACE, one of the photographers took a picture of a welfare recipient and that picture hangs in the back of the Department of Human

Services office. We don't know if it's an intimidation tactic or what it is, but often you can't trust the case worker person in that room. People are not sure what to share with that person. Often, women go home and just decide to struggle without the support of the state. There is the extended family unit which then surrounds people to help them survive. I think many times women go back to the extended family, which puts additional stress on families. That sometimes was happening as women dropped from the welfare roll. They just refused to deal with intimidation anymore.

Often, women go home and just decide to struggle without the support of the state.

Dr. Hill:

Something related to this that I'd like to throw out. In Florida, they have a citizen review panel where citizens from the county are the ones who determine whether or not a woman would be sanctioned. Thus, there is a lot of citizen oversight of what's happening with the Welfare Department. *Do you think that citizens oversight would make sense here in Mississippi?*

Reddy: Absolutely! I think that you should involve community people in your organizations' decision-making. Ordinary citizens see the world very differently. They are in a position to understand and see the world through the eyes of the person who is coming to the organization. I think that there is at least an opportunity that people will be treated fairly when decisions are made by ordinary people, the person living next door to you.

Simmons: We've been told that the numbers are dropping off tremendously, a decline of somewhere around 11 and 12,000 TANF individuals a month, and around 3,500 or so food stamp participants a month. Those are the numbers being put out.

The Department of Human Services should take a look at those numbers and not just say to us that they're dropping off. They should provide specifics, a record as to what is happening to those individuals. Whether they are cases that are just being closed as a result of the individuals deciding that they don't want to participate, or they are being removed from the roll as a result of sanctions or what the case may be.

Right now legislators do not have the information they need. We can't document what is happening to those cases, but it is something that must be monitored.

Right now legislators do not have the information they need. We can't document what is happening to those cases, but it is something that must be monitored. I would certainly encourage those of us who are in the communities, who are activists, and who are concerned, to document that information as we come in contact with those recipients.

Oleta Fitzgerald and her organization (Children's Defense Fund) put together a survey that gathers that kind of information. If we, as legislators, are able to go back into session in January with some meaningful documentation, we can pinpoint where the problems and the flaws are, and identify the concerns that we have with the administration of the Welfare Reform. We need that kind of information if we are to improve the system. Otherwise, it becomes very difficult for us to react to the concerns and the problems that cause individuals to fall through the cracks. We encourage you to be responsive to the survey that Oleta Fitzgerald has distributed. Other

groups are also working in the field to gather information and give that information to the legislative bodies and to your representatives from the various area.

Dr. Hill: Ms. Wienstein.

Weinstein: The issue of terminations or sanctions, the reasons people are leaving the caseload are critically important. Way before time limits, there were thousands upon thousands of people leaving the rolls because they are sanctioned. We've learned a few things about this.

First, the study from the General Accounting Office found that in all states, up to a certain period, not counting the increasing numbers leaving under TANF, 18,000 families were terminated and only three states accounted for 13,000 of them. There were very different policies going on in those states. For instance, a state like Wisconsin believed that if families did not do everything they were asked to do, if they did not bring in the papers they were supposed to bring, if they did not sign an agreement they were supposed to sign, they would be terminated. Whereas, other states decided that it

would be their failure as a state, if terminations occurred. Therefore, they went affirmatively, as apparently Florida and other states are doing, sometimes to do home visits, to do outreach, to figure out what was happening to a family before they simply cut them off.

You could look harder at Wisconsin. They discovered that of the families who were being sanctioned, about half of them who appealed, who knew enough to appeal, were sanctioned as a result of mistakes and they were reinstated. When you have a system where everyone is gung-ho to reduce the caseload, case workers make mistakes and those mistakes cause families to lose their livelihood.

When you have a system where everyone is gung-ho to reduce the caseload, case workers make mistakes and those mistakes cause families to lose their livelihood.

There was a press account in Wisconsin in which an official said that they changed doing things this way because of all the bad publicity it had, not because of all the suffering of the children and families. But, it does underscore Senator Simmons' comments in terms of the need to monitor so that you can tell people what is happening. If

that is what it takes to change the system for the better for families, then that is what we need to do.

Dr. Hill: At a conference last week, I heard a few stories for some reasons behind termination. One woman was just about to finish her training as a nurse, and she couldn't because of the TANF work requirements. She was angry with her case worker and was sanctioned for her anger. Another woman had to stay home to take care of her sick mother, did not show up for her job, and she was terminated. Another one had a job that sometimes was less than 20 hours, and she had a problem because she couldn't meet the 20 hours a week work requirements. If you don't show up for an appointment on time, depending on your case worker, you can be terminated, no matter how good your cause. There are plenty of problems here in Mississippi with the kinds of sanctions that we have.

Simmons: Now we have in the law, as a matter of fact, an amendment that I offered to the bill that deals with due process. The due process provision basically says that an individual is not to be sanctioned until such time as they

have due process, this should give them an opportunity to present their case.

...the due process provision basically says that an individual is not to be sanctioned until such time as they have...an opportunity to present their case.

After presenting their case, they can appeal if they are not satisfied with the decision that's rendered in the process. If that is not happening, documentation needs to be provided so that we can deal with the Department of Human Services, or whoever is responsible for working through that process. Now the public needs to know what the process is, but individuals should not be cut off because of emotional attitudes, or hostility simply because the case worker has some problems with the way in which the client was dealing with them.

That leads us to another problem which we hope is being taken care of as we speak. That problem is training of employees in the Department of Human Services.

Training is required on how to deal with the transformation that is taking place within the agency itself.

Training is required on how to deal with the transformation that is taking place

within the agency itself. We are seeing employees moving from being an eligibility case worker responsible for certifying whether or not a person is eligible to being a counselor, working with a client, helping them become self-sufficient. It is a different approach and appropriate attitude, training and skills development are things with which we are concerned. Again, we do need feedback to make sure that process is working.

Dr. Hill: At this time I'd like to allow panelists who have something that they're just dying to say and haven't had the chance to feel free to jump in.

Hall: I'd just like to mention a concern from the private sector side of it, more as a question and a challenge to all of us. The first solution is obviously training and eventually a good job. The second solution is for private industry to make a commitment to doing everything possible to provide jobs. George Walker can tell you that talk about Welfare Reform is not being carried on in the chambers of commerce by businessmen. It is not being carried on at the country club by businessmen. But the businessmen have the answers.

You as agency representatives, have to fill in that gap and try to educate those businessmen that Welfare Reform can be good for business.

We are in business to achieve one thing; the number one goal of business is to make a profit. My question and my challenge to you is how do you align this profit motive of business with the job creation solution? I think that the name of the game is communication, trying to respond to some of the issues and to provide a higher trained work force so that we can compete in this global economy. That is a challenge to all of us.

Walker: Thank you. I would like to make two or three comments which are not totally appropriate to some of the things we are talking about. I've learned some things and earned some of these gray hairs, so I'd like to tell you a little bit about what I think I've learned.

First, people want to work. I started a company in the Mississippi Delta coming from Massachusetts back some years ago, and this became a very technical business. The business has succeeded for the employees as well as for the employer, and basically, this has been done with work force training and

having a lot of faith and trust in people. I think anyone who knows the story of Delta Wire in Clarksdale will know I am not exaggerating. I've learned that people want to work and if you give them a chance, they will work, but they have to be trained.

I've learned that people want to work and if you give them a chance, they will work, but they have to be trained.

Unless a person is competent to do something, they cannot succeed. Nor can that company. Because Delta Wire competes with the people in Belgium, Korea and Japan and places in the United States, we have to have trained people. People will work, they appreciate work. I have seen this again and again, and I can give you testimonies that would bore you to tears, but I believe that.

The second thing I believe is that bringing economic opportunity to our people is one of the most positive things any of us can do. There is no way a company can employ a person in world class competition, the way it is today, unless that person has been trained to do the job. There is just no way. If they do that they will be out of business, and then everyone is out of luck. We have to have the training programs.

I am also involved in the Tri-County Workforce Alliance, which operates in Bolivar, Coahoma and Quitman County. I am on the executive board of the Enterprise Corporation of the Delta. We have looked at it with the idea that if you have three categories you can handle it a little bit easier.

First, and perhaps the most important long term issue, is the future work force. The future work force is made of the people who are going to be working in our companies and our stores and our banks 10 and 15 years from now. The education they get from K through 12th and pre-school, and Head Start is absolutely critical. We have to stress the future work force.

The second category we have to look at is the current work force. As the business world gets more complex, if we don't train our current workers and new workers and continue to train them, then we can't compete and survive. The third categorization I would offer you, which is perhaps very appropriate today, is the out of work force people.

As the business world gets more complex, if we don't train our current workers and new workers and continue to train them, then we can't compete and survive.

We need the out of work force people in the work force. We need them for a lot of reasons. A lot of speakers have told you the reasons. As a businessman, I will tell you again, if for no other reason, because our companies and employers need the people. Mark Manning mentioned a number of things very well. One of them is the dichotomy where you have people who are not working, and people who tell you that they would expand their business if they only had the people. But, then you ask the next question, which is "who is this person you want to hire?" They don't want to hire anyone, they want to hire someone who can do Statistical Process Control, do statistics, or run a lab. Clearly, as Mark said, training is the key.

One other category I would like to mention is education. As a lay person in education, I am chairman of the State Community College Board. I am so intensely proud of our community colleges, for the work they are doing in this whole field. If there is anyone that will pull us through and meet the criteria that Mark Manning talked about, it will come from the colleges' skill tech programs. The legislature, in their wisdom, passed the Work Force Training Act of 1994, and each

community college has a Skill Tech Center. We are indeed fortunate to have Coahoma Community College and Mississippi Delta Community College in this area. I have learned that the sled that is going to pull us into the future is centered on education, particularly if we are dealing with adults in our community colleges.

Dr. Hill: I do have one comment here. I have not separated the Delta from all of Mississippi, and looking at the numbers that I have, it seems that if a welfare mother is the head of a family, then she has a lot of work experience in general. She usually has a high school diploma.

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There might be a large number of women who are on welfare or who have been on welfare who are very trainable. The problems are that they had a sick child, a sick grandmother, they've just gotten divorced, there are transportation problems, or some other practical details that must be worked out.

Walker: I could mention that at Coahoma Community College, there is a

Skill-Tech program, which is offers industrial training, and a Vo-tech program. Both have done wonderful jobs under the leadership of Dr. Vivian Presley. Plans include opening a day care center in the industrial park in Coahoma County. These programs will be providing industrial training.

Dr. Hill: People see the welfare mother as someone who does not have her high school diploma, but that is a small percentage. A large percentage have their high school diplomas, and others have their bachelor's degrees, however what they all have in common is the fact that they have small children, most of them under the age of five.

Reddy: Actually, there are some women I'm involved with who may not have a high school diploma, but at the same time, I know of one recipient who has a paralegal degree who cannot find employment. They sent her to a day care center work site. When she complained to the case worker, saying she had the skills to be better employed, the case worker eventually called the site and told them to have her sit by the front door and let her answer phone calls occasionally.

There is not a good match between skills, training, and the work site. Somehow we are either not talking to those people whose lives are impacted, or we are making decisions outside of their needs, and I think that is really important. We have to bring consumers to the table. We can not make those decisions without their input, because the situations can be very different.

I think we need to start listening to consumers when they say, for example, that they have a problem with a sick child. Just as the recipient who could not be here this morning because she is admitting her daughter in the hospital. At her work site placement, when she brings her excuse back, that excuse may present a problem. I think that we really need to start involving consumers, asking for their input, and genuinely giving them the opportunity for input into decisions.

Ferguson: Let me pick up a minute where Mr. Walker left off. Mid Delta Work Force Alliance is a sister organization of Tri-County Workforce Alliance. We deal with work force in terms of helping businesses develop the current work force, and working with schools and businesses to ensure that the

future work force is capable of doing what businesses want. The hard core of what we are about is work force development for the three counties that we work in - Washington and Sunflower Counties in Mississippi, and Chicot County in Arkansas. This program includes the out of school, out of work adult program for adults who did not finish school.

We have developed, with the help of Mississippi Delta Community College, a pre-employment program that has worked wonders in terms of people who graduated from the program. However, we are failing to really do an adequate job with the people who do not make it through the program. A system needs to be implemented for those people who did not make it through the pre-employment program to ensure that the needs of that group are met. People who fail these programs just drop back out without any hope or help or aspirations for getting a job.

A system needs to be implemented for those people who did not make it through the pre-employment program to ensure that the needs of that group are met.

Until we develop a system that is going to ensure that they have the tools

that Mr. Walker talked about in terms of training, the economic and social condition of the community is not going to improve. We need to be talking about collaboration and partnership with businesses and schools and other community-based organizations, churches, and individuals to find solutions. One phrase that I have heard pretty often since I have been part of the work force alliance is "if you keep doing what you have been doing, you are going to keep getting what you have been getting." If you don't like the results, you have to change what you do.

Simmons: Right, changes cannot be temporary. Training and education systems and collaboration must be planned for the future. My challenge to all of us is that Welfare Reform ought to be treated as if it were a large industry existing in the community and rumor got out that it was about to exit the community. In essence, the Federal government and the third party payment that we have been receiving, is somewhat of an industry to the community and to the state.

My challenge to all of us is that Welfare Reform ought to be treated as if it were a large industry existing in the community and rumor got out that it was about to exit the community.

If these funds are no longer going to be there, then we should aggressively do what we would do if that industry were going to be leaving. First, we would go after trying to keep it in the area. If they decided to exit anyway, we would work aggressively with those individuals who are affected by the exit of that industry to make sure that they were placed in a job wherever possible, where jobs existed. If this were not possible, then we would attempt to re-locate another industry to replace that industry. If that incoming industry were going to be high-tech, and the workforce needed training, then we would train them so that when the new industry comes in, the workforce would be ready to go into that job. We must do the same kind of thing with the Welfare Reform program and the recipients that are here.

Dr. Hill: Senator Simmons, what you have just said is good for us to think about during the break. When we come back, there will be time for audience questions. Let's think about that idea of

losing a major employer in the state and how we are going to respond. Questions from the floor may follow.

Dr. Hill:

If you have a question, raise your hand please. For those of you who have your hands up, would you please come up and use the microphone.

Audience Member: How many people receiving assistance were invited to attend this conference and how many were invited to be on the panel?

Dr. Hill: I am not the organizer of this forum, but I do know that we invited several welfare recipients to be on this panel.

Audience Member: How can we expect to fill a glass that is half empty when the people that we are talking about are not even present? That would be like you and Dr. Hill having a discussion about me and you don't even know me. We do not have the people we are talking about here. How can we sit back and address their feelings when they are not here? This reform doesn't make sense to me.

We are saying that we want to

transform and put everything into perspective. We do not have the work force in perspective, so how are we going to get the non-working force into perspective? People who go to work every day are struggling just like those who are not working. We are forgetting the basic point which is love for the children.

Welfare is not a cycle for everyone, contrary to what you may believe. I am a product of a welfare home, but I am not a welfare recipient.

Welfare is not a cycle for everyone, contrary to what you may believe. I am a product of a welfare home, but I am not a welfare recipient. We must realize that some parents who stay home every day with their kids cannot give them money, they give their children love.

You have people out working every day who don't even know what is going on with their children's lives because they work, work, work, work, work, and then when the children are into trouble with the system, the first people they look at is the parents. But, you have told the parents to work, work, work, work, work, be self-sufficient, non-dependent upon the system.

Lastly, I would like to say our tax dollars aren't going to those who are

receiving welfare, they are going to help the nation build more bombs. I think we need to be having bomb reform here.

Dr. Hill: I see you got a great audience response on that. I think you have made some valid points in terms of whether we are concerned about the children, and how we are providing for the children. We're requiring jobs, but are we requiring quality child care, wrap-around service for the parents?

Reddy: Dr. Hill, may I just make a comment? I concur with the young lady that as we come together in forums like this to dialog, the forum should be representative of those people's lives we impact. I completely agree. Both of the respondents that were invited to the conference today were unable to attend. One of them had child care issues, and as we all know for women who work, that is an issue. The other respondent needed to place her child in the hospital today. They weren't able to be here. I speak for those who can not be here today, and I continue to advocate for women or men who are involved in Welfare Reform that they be at the table during decision-making times.

Dr. Hill: Next question.

Audience Member: Good morning. Like the speaker before me, I was a product of welfare, too. My parents received welfare when my father had a stroke. As we talk about taking people off welfare and putting them to work, the question I wanted to ask is "Why does Mississippi only attract minimum wage jobs?" We've got to provide better paying jobs for people because the minimum you might pay for child care is \$45 a week. If you work at a minimum wage job, you're paying rent, buying food, then how can you pay for child care? The future looks really bleak.

If you work at a minimum wage job, you're paying rent, buying food, then how can you pay for child care? The future looks really bleak.

I picked up the paper this morning and it said Drew Plastics Factory may shut its doors and they employ 130 people. Last year, a plant closed in Drew. This year, another plant will close in Drew. Most factory workers do not have their high school diploma. Most of them just have an elementary school education. We've got to attract some industries. We have to educate our

people too. We have to attract better industry than fish processing plants and small factories that are going to pay minimum wage. What are we going to do to attract better industry in this area?

Dr. Hill: Does anyone want to respond to how we can attract better industry into this area?

Hall: Let me just mention something that George [Walker] talked about. I also serve in a capacity as the president of the Washington County Industrial Foundation, and we basically chase industry. The criteria that industry is looking for in a community now has totally changed. There was a time when we could see Mississippi as a "come here and you can get good workers at low wages," "You can run away from the unions," etc. That day and age has changed.

...we have to begin to demand, and I mean demand from our educational institutions within the state, that we begin to do a better job of educating our people.

My answer to your question, and I think you had a very salient point, is that we have to begin to demand, and I mean demand from our educational institutions

within the state, that we begin to do a better job of educating our people. If that means bringing teachers' pay way up, if that means having school all year long, whatever it takes. Because that is what's going to attract industry here. I spent a couple of days on the east coast recently, and I was envious passing through North Carolina and Alabama. You see the Mercedes plant, the BMW plants, and I asked those folks over there, "what is the difference?" The key is education, and that has to be the first step that we have to take.

Walker: I have studied this very diligently. There was an economic balance throughout the United States, perhaps the world, but throughout the United States you can look at the education level of the population, and it will tell you what the economy and pay rates are in that area. It is sad, but it is true and we have to deal with the educational gap.

Dr. Hill: Well, there are two parts to it. It is certainly true that if you look at women, for instance, who have not finished high school, about two-thirds of them will be poor. If you go on to the next group, the group that has finished

high school, the number who will be poor, drops down to about 34% and it keeps going down. The numbers and percentages keep going down until and for those finishing a BA, only about 10% will be poor. So, obviously, education is the key. It is not the only issue, though, because we have a diminishing number of jobs with decent pay. That means to me that if we are a nation bound and determined in implementing this welfare law, it suggests that everyone must go out and work. That means that there have to be income supplements to get the family out of poverty, to a point where they can make ends meet.

Simmons: The only thing I would like to add to that is entrepreneurship. I think it is very important that we do more for the creation of the entrepreneur, especially in the black community. Currently you find that the dollar turns over little or not at all in the black community, and as a result of that, you continue to see a decline in that community. We must do all that we've talked about today, but also we must partner and mentor and put individuals into business, train them how to manage and operate their own business, and allow them to employ individuals. I

think it will take a combination of all those things in order to get us where we need to be as far as being empowered.

...also we must partner and mentor and put individuals into business, train them how to manage and operate their own business, and allow them to employ individuals.

Audience Member: Another word we have kind of crossed over is depression. Not just depressed economically, but if you look at the welfare recipient, these people have to get beyond being depressed mentally. So, when we start talking about training them, not just training them to go to the job at 8:00 o'clock, or you have to be at work five or six days a week, there has to be some kind of training in place that teaches them again how to be creative in deciding their own destiny. These kinds of training programs are not being implemented.

Another point I would like to ask Ms. Denson, from JTPA - What is JTPA? When you're talking about making a person employable again, are there aptitude tests for these people? Not everyone can go into McDonald's and flip a burger and be successful. Not everyone can go into a factory and work

eight to ten hours a day. Are there aptitude tests in place with JTPA to help place them in areas where they would do well?

Denson: Certainly. Every individual who goes through JTPA has a complete assessment, beginning with math and reading, as well as aptitude.

Audience Member: The other question I would like to ask is, will the business sector absorb the cost of training people for higher level paying jobs? Not just the entry level, but higher paying jobs?

Walker: I think yes, because obviously the businesses won't survive. If the businesses can't be competitive, they are out of here. I have not run across any business that was unwilling to spend a great deal of money in training their people. The community colleges have an employees certification program where the people receive a TABE test, and go on to an ABE, or whatever they need, or onto jobs. There is already a program in place to carry forth what you would like to see.

Denson: I would add further that individuals need to learn how to traverse

the labor market. They may start out in a minimum wage job, but they need to understand that they can't stay there. They need to learn how to navigate within the labor market, and everybody needs to learn that.

...individuals need to learn how to traverse the labor market.

Dr. Hill: There is a program in Chicago called Project Match that starts with the premise that everyone is different, that some people are able to stay in school and go from there to a job. People who do not do well in a traditional academic setting may need to start a job. Project Match is there for everybody when they move out of their first job. It speaks to the need for supports. Some people are lucky enough that they get the support in their own community, their own families, but other people don't have these supports. Project Match helps people to move from one situation to another so that if they have that first job and say, "well now, I see a bit more clearly what I want, and that I am going to need more training," then they help them move there.

Audience Member: My name is Oleta Fitzgerald and I'll be around all day. We

are looking for people to help us monitor what is happening to recipients so that we can provide information to the legislature in the session coming up on things that can change. The other thing I would like to reiterate is that as we talk, we have a clock ticking. We have five years to move people from welfare to work.

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They have five years that they can receive any support. If we don't provide that, these people will rest in your communities, unemployed and without income, and that creates other problems.

If we don't provide that, these people will rest in your communities, unemployed and without income, and that creates other problems.

In terms of work site, my pet project here is that everyone who is to move off welfare into work is not going to immediately move into a job, into a regular kind of job. In our communities, we have other problems. We have children who are not doing anything after school. We have children on the weekends who don't have any kind of

recreational activities.

Local communities, local governments, local churches, local non-profit organizations should look at how we may employ welfare recipients to provide after-school tutorial programs.

Local communities, local governments, local churches, local non-profit organizations should look at how we may employ welfare recipients to provide after-school tutorial programs. How do we employ welfare recipients to do weekend 4-H clubs? If Boys and Girls Clubs work, how do we get the state to allow us to hire welfare recipients? Now, that does not move them to self-sufficiency, nor does working 20 hours a week. But, it starts moving people out of homes and into the larger world where they can get greater access and learn how to work. It puts people into environments where folks have time to work with them and tell them how to answer the phone, how to dress, how to respond to people.

In addition, we are not providing for children. Both the federal and state laws allow child care where it is available for children who are six and under. Nothing magical happens between six and seven, so you may have children ages seven to

thirteen at home alone after school, and in the summer. That is a time bomb ticking. Part of the TANF bill says that its goal is to decrease pregnancy. If we leave our 13 year olds at home, we've got a problem.

The other thing I would like to talk about is the capacity problem. The federal law only allows a certain percentage of people on TANF into training programs at any point in time. They can be in training only one year. On-the-job training is only six months. We don't have any organized way of working the people who are already trained. So we've got some problems that we've got to discuss with our legislature.

Both the state and federal law require children of welfare recipients, or children of the head of welfare households, to be in school.

The final thing is for those of you who represent educational institutions, particularly the secondary schools. Both the state and federal law require children of welfare recipients, or children of the head of welfare households, to be in school. The Mississippi Delta has some of the highest school dropout rates in the

country. Those children have to re-enter the school system. I don't think any of us are prepared to have children coming back into the public school who might have been out of school three years, who are now 16 and 17, back in class with 13 and 14 year olds. So, we have some problems to deal with in the afternoon session and I wanted to be sure we did not go into those sessions without the benefit of that information.

Dr. Hill: Thank you, Oleta. As of now I see five more questions, so I am going to have these five questions and no more than five minutes for question and response.

Audience Member: I am Ernest Holmes, from Washington County Board of Supervisors and this is to Mr. John Ferguson. I have been listening to everyone talk about training and education, and I would like for him to elaborate a bit on the program called Job Start that deals with the youth and is sponsored by The Center for Employment Training.

Ferguson: What Mr. Holmes just addressed is a program that a group associated with the Mid-Delta Work

Force Alliance has identified. It is one of the better training programs in the nation that provides training for the hard core unemployed, primarily people without an education, and without any job experience. From all reports that we've received it has been very successful in training and in employing these people. Getting the jobs for those hard core persons involves a process they call joint training. They both educate and train at the same time. We are exploring the possibility of learning more about this. We hope to make a site visit sometime soon to bring back more information to the community. The people who don't get into the pre-employment programs need to have a system to get into, and we think that the CET kind of program will provide that opportunity for employment.

Dr. Hill: Thank you for the information.

Audience Member: I am TANF. I am also a senior here at Delta State. I am a mother of 11 children, 9 successfully out of the house and going to college or taking care of their own children. I have not always been on welfare, but I have been on and off in raising my children. We are not TANF, we are people. We

are on welfare for a number of reasons, either through stupidity, our own as well as others, or lack of opportunity, or the fact that the family unit is not in tact. Welfare helps separate the family unit.

I am working part time during my senior year, I'm on the Dean's list. I will not receive any child care, any transportation cost, anything. Why should I sign those papers for the JOBS program? We can't get checks for child care. Nobody wants to babysit for a JOBS program participant because they don't get paid. So, a program is not realistic when it arbitrarily makes policy for people you have not consulted. Now consult me. I am here.

Dr. Hill: I feel that I should point out that none of us made the policy, either.

Audience Member: Possibly Senator Simmons, you may be able to answer my question. It concerns the law that a maximum of 20% can be trained through the vocational technical division. The program is one year or less. My concern is that there are very good paying jobs out there that people can have if they have two years of training. I am very concerned that they stipulated a year or less when we know that if they get at

So, why are we not allowing these recipients to get into a program that will give them two years of very good skills and get a good paying job?

least two years in a particular skill, they will get very good paying jobs. So, why are we not allowing these recipients to get into a program that will give them two years of very good skills and get a good paying job? I think you would have a better worker if you let that person be trained in an area that he or she really wants, and if it takes two years, fine, because you won't have to worry about them coming back to welfare in six months.

Simmons: There are two phases of training. One that deals with TANF funds and you are limited and restricted in those funds. Those monies are transferred out of TANF into SSBG Block Grants, which along with state monies or JTPA dollars, can be utilized to extend the training. However, if you are speaking just to the TANF dollars, then we are going to be restricted to that pool of money and the amount of time that a person can be in training.

What has to happen is that state and local industries, organizations like the

Chamber of Commerce, need to look at what their particular needs are, then address those needs. Working with the community colleges, the vocational training, and other kinds of training, individuals can be trained on a long-term basis. But, if you are looking just at TANF funds, then we are going to be limited based upon federal law and what the state passed regarding the amount of time a person can be in that particular training.

Dr. Hill: Okay, next question.

Audience Member: I am the pastor of the Catholic Church in Shaw and Mound Bayou. Today we have looked at this issue from its political aspects, its social aspects, its educational aspects, I just felt compelled to say that it is a moral issue as well, not just an issue of finances or unemployment. The way I read the gospels, Jesus talked more about money and the issues attached to money and material things than he ever said about sex. Jesus spoke very infrequently about sexual morality, but he spent an awful lot of time talking about the morality of material things. Total the number of times he speaks about the morality of material possessions, and his talk about

the morality of material possessions and how we use our material wealth, particularly how they impact the poor in society and you will learn that he spoke about money much more frequently than he ever says about sexual morality. And we tout being a Christian society. We Christians rally around the abortion issue, which is related to sexual morality. But when it comes to the welfare reform issue, where are we? That is all I wanted to say.

Dr. Hill: If I can just get in a comment in answer to several people's questions. What was the motivation of the people who passed the welfare law at the federal level? Balancing the budget was the top concern at the time, not eliminating poverty. Most of us here don't have any illusions about that. A positive approach is critical. I think we all need to figure out how to eliminate the worst problems arising under the law, and to identify what states can do to move beyond the present and create the best program we can. There are a couple of examples. For instance, Oleta Fitzgerald mentioned this business about child care. The federal law says that nobody with children under six can be penalized for refusing a work placement if there is no

child care for that child. The federal law does not say that there can be no child care provided for a kid over the age of six. That is up to the state, to do better.

The federal law says that nobody with children under six can be penalized for refusing a work placement if there is no child care for that child.

There are choices to be made here. You can insist on child care being provided. On-the-job training lasting for six months, that may be the choice here in Mississippi, but it is not a federal law. There is no limit on the amount of on-the-job training possible under the federal law. There are moral questions to be raised as to what choices will be made here.

Reddy: Can I make a comment before we close?

Dr. Hill: Yes, now is the time for any panelist who has closing comments.

Reddy: I want to make a comment to the young lady attending Delta State. She is absolutely right, and as I said many times before, when decisions are made to impact our lives, we must be at the table as well. I want to comment on

the traditional feature of African American families, in particular, where the grandparents don't necessarily go through a legal process to adopt children. Welfare reform is now saying to them that they need to get a job. It's a moral question. We have to make decisions. Was that something the state had to make a decision about? We can force grandparents out to work, but is that fair? We have seniors in our communities who are starving now as a result of Welfare Reform. As an advocate, I certainly will not sit back and allow things to go on without having a voice in them. That certainly is a feature of African American families, so we need to look at policies, how they're made and how they impact our lives.

Simmons: I have a friend. His new family was on AFDC and was living in subsidized housing. He started dating this young lady and they fell in love and wanted to get married. She has three kids and after they were married, the rent in that housing facility went up so high, that they could not afford to stay there, so they had to move into a shack. He was making \$5.50 an hour where he was working. In addition to that, they lost part of their food stamps because of his

income.

At first, the children were excited about his coming into their lives. He was adding the male figure and the \$5.50 an hour, but the couple was not married. When they got married, his income became part of the family income. As a result of that, the children now see him as a liability, and it is creating problems for that family. That is the welfare system that we have. That was the welfare system that was in place before Congress passed this monster that we are talking about now, and the President signed it. Now, that kind of welfare system drives men away from home; it penalizes individuals for trying to have that family.

What we need to do is to take advantage of the windows of opportunities that may exist there at the state level, the federal level, and the local level, and build a system that is going to empower.

What we need to do is to take advantage of the windows of opportunities that may exist there at the state level, the federal level, and the local level, and build a system that is going to empower. I hope we will look at it from that perspective in trying to deal with the families, and trying to bring jobs that are going to cause

individuals to be able to make a living to support themselves. Certainly, there may be individuals who will be affected negatively. There is going to be some suffering. But, in the end, we must come out with a program that is going to cause my people, our citizens, to be empowered. If we fail to do that, then we are going to be in much more trouble from the social problems in the future than we are today.

I hope that when we finish with the analysis, we will come together and say that we are going to work together to cause this to be a successful program. My final words are that what we have, ladies and gentlemen, certainly has not worked in the best interest of the poor folks and black folks and individuals who are on the welfare program.

Dr. Hill: I am very excited that this conference is the start of something good. Although the law has some problems, even those who see it as a lemon have been thinking about ways to make lemonade, or at least get started on it.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Dr. Marianne Hill, at the Center for Policy Research and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, has done extensive research on the issues surrounding welfare reform. The following material provides additional information on welfare reform. The first two items are excerpts from conferences at which Dr. Hill was a speaker. The third item contains information about an article that was published in the January, 1998, issue of *Mississippi Economic Review and Outlook*.

Presentation to Women's Studies Conference, October 23, 1997

While the new TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) program increases the funding available for childcare and transportation, these funding levels are not adequate, and the new work requirements and time limits on welfare can be expected to impose hardship on many families, with these costs borne largely by children and their mothers.

Twenty-four percent of the state lives in poverty (225,000 HH) and almost one quarter of these are on TANF. Forty-three percent of blacks and twelve percent of whites live in poverty. One third of the state's children live in poverty, while seventy percent of the state's children are being raised by single mothers.

The vulnerability of children dependent on women is the crux of the welfare problem. Women in our society are at risk because our society has failed women, and in doing so, puts children at risk. Most women at risk of divorce in Mississippi are at risk of becoming welfare recipients. In the United States, forty-five percent of divorced women with children receive welfare at some point. For unmarried mothers, the risk is even greater.

Women in our society are not expected to be economically independent, even when working full time. At the median, a black woman working year-round, full time earns forty-six percent what a white man working year-round and full time earns (1990 Census). At the median, the average earnings of a full time, black, female workers would be below the poverty line for a family of four.

Characteristics of AFDC mothers put them especially at risk. Over half of the AFDC recipients have less than a high school education. Typically, she will have a preschool

child, no car, and because her race is black, she faces a higher unemployment rate.

Between September 1995 and September 1997, the family caseload for AFDC/TANF dropped from 51,107 to 30,934, a thirty-nine percent drop. The falling numbers mean that many have turned to family, charities, and friends. Some charity organizations are reporting large increases in the numbers coming for food and shelter. For example, Stewpot Community Services in Jackson used to supply about 800 families each month with a four day food supply of food up to three times each year. Beginning in June, there has been an increase from 1200-1300 families. The number fed per day has risen from 130 to 300, with the increase for women and children.

It should be noted that many of these recipients who are sanctioned have not shown up for their required interviews and training sessions, even when transportation and childcare have been provided.

Presentation at Millsaps College Forum, February, 17, 1997 in Jackson, Mississippi

Welfare, as we have had it, has been the lowest cost program possible. Low cost has been more important than effectiveness, at approximately \$120/month for three. Usually, families rely on friends or relatives, and share housing.

One consequence of welfare reform has been increased homelessness. In Milwaukee, most families seeking shelter Christmas Eve had lost welfare benefits recently, thirty percent from an error. Already there have been serious administrative problems with the new legislation. Childcare providers are not paid in a timely manner, caseworkers misinform recipients about requirements and wrongly deny eligibility.

In addition, work requirements alone fail to address the problems of poverty that existed prior to welfare reform. One quarter of the population live in poverty. Most female heads of households are on public assistance and are low-wage workers, in and out of the labor force. They have had a job within the last 2 years, and will be cut off welfare within 2.5 years. These are workers who need job training and access to non-female jobs. These women need health care, even after the \$368 in countable income permitted. They also need affordable, licensed childcare. A little support to these part time workers can mean a lot in terms of long-term outlook for their children. Longer term recipients with no work experience need more intervention.

In fact, the best approach to ending welfare, as we know it, is the preventative approach. Girls need goals besides motherhood. We need to take the licenses of men who do not pay child support. The legislation is in place, but few licenses have been lost. We need to provide a good, solid education for young women, with real employment opportunities open to them afterwards. There are no short cuts. There are no alternatives to improving educational and employment opportunities for young women.

WELFARE REFORM: ISSUES TO BE ADDRESSED

(Published in *Mississippi Economic Review and Outlook*, January 1998)

Marianne Hill, Ph.D.

Mississippi Center for Policy Research and Planning

In the January 1998 edition of the *Mississippi Economic Review and Outlook*, Marriane Hill provides some insight into the difficulties involved in restructuring welfare as an assistance plan for low-income workers who are single parents. The article can be obtained by contacting:

Marriane Hill, Ph.D.

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Appendix B

Welfare Reform: Challenges and Opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships

*A Conference for Local Government Officials
in
the Mississippi Delta Region*

CONFERENCE PARTNERS

The Delta Partners Initiative
Center for Community Development
Delta State University
P. O. Box 3134
Cleveland, MS 38733
601.846.4358

Mississippi Action for Community Education
119 South Theobald St.
Greenville, MS 38701
601.335.3523

Mid-Delta Workforce Alliance
P. O. Box 1101
Greenville, MS 38702
601.332.4388

Tri-County Workforce Alliance
P. O. Box 1348
Clarksdale, MS 38614
601.627.3011

ADDITIONAL FINANCIAL SUPPORTERS

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The Mid-Delta Workforce Alliance and the Tri-County Workforce Alliance are funded through a major grant from the Pew Charitable Trusts to the Foundation for the Mid-South in support of the Delta Partnership.

Appendix C

CONFERENCE PLANNING COMMITTEE

Les Range
Delta Partners Initiative

Oleta Fitzgerald
Black Community Crusade for Children/
Childrens' Defense Fund

John Ferguson
Mid-Delta Workforce Alliance

Linda Kelly
Coahoma Community College

James Rodges, Mayor
City of Shaw, MS

Stewart Guernsey
North Delta Mississippi Enterprise Community

Bill Butts
Delta State University

Cliff Brumfield
Greenwood-Leflore-Carroll Economic
Development Foundation

Leroy Davis
Alcorn State University

Jerome Burton
Cooperative Extension Program
Alcorn State University

Pam Moore
Delta Partners Initiative

Ellen Reddy
Mississippi Action for Community Education

Josephine Rhymes
Tri-County Workforce Alliance

Oscar Peace, Mayor
City of Hollandale, MS

Hon. Willie Simmons
Mississippi Legislature

Bonnie Teater
Southern Rural Development Center

Jerry W. Robinson, Jr.
Center for Community Development
Delta State University

Marilyn Hansel
Office of Congressman Bennie Thompson

Joe McGilberry
Cooperative Extension Service
Mississippi State University

Raygene Paige
Cooperative Extension Service
Mississippi State University

Appendix D

Welfare Reform: Challenges and Opportunities for Public-Private Partnerships

A Conference for Local Government Officials in the Mississippi Delta Region

Delta State University
Thursday, May 29, 1997
9:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.

AGENDA

8:00 a.m. **REGISTRATION**
(Lobby, Ewing Hall)

Coffee and pastries will be provided for early bird arrivals.

9:30 a.m. **OPENING SESSION**
(The Delta Room, Ewing Hall)

Opening Remarks

Les Range, Delta Partners Initiative, Session Moderator

Introduction of DSU President

Dr. Jerry W. Robinson, Jr., Director, Center for Community Development

Welcome

Dr. Kent Wyatt, President

Conference Goals and Objectives

Ruby Buck, President and CEO, Mississippi Action for Community Education

Setting the Stage: Regional Implications

Mark Manning, Director of Development, The Delta Council

10:00 a.m. **PLENARY SESSION**
(The Delta Room, Ewing Hall)

Introductions and Overview

Dr. Marianne Hill, Center for Policy Research and Planning, Mississippi Institutions of Higher Learning, Session Moderator

Panel Presentation: State and Federal Legislative Updates

Senator Willie Simmons, Mississippi Legislature
Representative Robert J. "Bobby" Moody, Mississippi Legislature
Deborah Weinstein, Childrens' Defense Fund

Respondents:

STATE PERSPECTIVE (Job Training and Job Generation)

Jean Denson, Manager, Employment Training Division, Mississippi Department of Economic and Community Development
Harold Hall, Fine Vines, WorkFirst Participant (Employer)
Barbara Petty, WorkFirst Participant (Consumer)

REGIONAL PERSPECTIVES (Workforce Development)

John Ferguson, Director, Mid-Delta Workforce Alliance
George Walker, Co-Chair, Tri-County Workforce Alliance

12:00 Noon **ADJOURNMENT**

12:30 noon **LUNCHEON**
(State Room, DSU Campus Union Building)

Musical Prelude

Invocation

James E. Rodges, Mayor, Shaw, MS

Welcome and Introductions

Oscar C. Peace, Mayor, Hollandale, MS (Emcee)

Introduction of Congressman Bennie Thompson

Harry Bowie, President and CEO, The Delta Foundation

Remarks and Introduction of Keynote Speaker

Congressman Bennie Thompson

Keynote Speaker

Senator Paul Wellstone, State of Minnesota

Closing Remarks

Harold Lathon, Executive Director, Mid-Delta Empowerment Zone Alliance

1:45 p.m. ADJOURNMENT

2:00 p.m. SMALL GROUP FEEDBACK AND INPUT SESSIONS
(Ewing Hall, designated classrooms)

Room assignments are explained in your Conference Resource Manual. Each small group will be facilitated by a four-person team which will include a lead facilitator, recorder and two resource persons. The lead facilitator will be responsible for engaging participants in a discussion on 1) emerging issues and challenges on the local level, 2) program and project opportunities, 3) technical assistance and training needs.

SMALL GROUP MEETING LEAD FACILITATORS:

TEAM A: Stewart Guernsey, North Delta Enterprise Community
TEAM B: Cliff Brumfield, Greenwood-Leflore-Carroll Economic Development Foundation
TEAM C: Bonnie Teater, Southern Rural Development Center
TEAM D: Beverly Divers-White, Foundation for the Mid-South
TEAM E: Ellen Reddy, Mississippi Action for Community Education
TEAM F: Linda Kelly, Coahoma Community College

3:30 p.m. ADJOURNMENT

3:45 p.m. DEBRIEFING SESSION WITH LEAD FACILITATORS AND RECORDERS
(The Delta Room, Ewing Hall)